DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 726 SP 040 872

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TITLE Caring as Relating: Illuminating the Cognitive-Affective Connection in Teaching.
PUB DATE 2002-04-00
NOTE 33p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Augmentative and Alternative Communication; Communication Skills; Elementary Education; Knowledge Base for Teaching; Multiple Disabilities; Pedagogical Content Knowledge; *Special Education Teachers; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Competencies; Teacher Expectations of Students; Teacher Responsibility; Teacher Role; Teaching Methods; Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Caring; Teacher Knowledge

ABSTRACT

This study examined the teaching practices of Maria, a special education teacher who worked with students who had multiple disabilities, were nonverbal, and used augmentative and alternative communication. The study focused on the complex, interdependent, and dynamic nature of teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices, illuminating the connection between the affective and cognitive dimensions of the teacher. It looked at what Maria knew and believed that led her to teach her students as she did. Data were collected via classroom observations over 5 months, semi-structured interviews with Maria and members of her classroom team, and analysis of pertinent documents. Results indicated that Maria's beliefs about her students, her role and responsibilities as their teacher, and the nature of knowledge interacted to define her teaching practices and, in turn, shape her evolving knowledge, particularly her pedagogical content knowledge or wisdom of practice. The results highlighted an affective dimension of teaching defined as caring, which was witnessed in Maria's interactions with her students and team members. Maria defined and made sense of her teaching and determined what counted as being important for her students based on both the cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching. (Contains 57 references.) (SM)

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Donna R. McGhie-Richmond

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Caring as Relating:

Illuminating the Cognitive-Affective Connection in Teaching

ED 465 726

> *I learned early on how lucky I was to work with these kids. Certain teachers would think they weren't lucky to work with this population. I've always felt really lucky to work with these kids because you're sort of unlocking the secret in a way. This personality, this person is able to develop and bloom and come out and if I can have a small role in that, well, I just feel very privileged (Interview, Maria, June 14).*

These are words spoken by a teacher. Maria teaches students who have multiple disabilities, are non-speaking, and use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Her words reveal deeply held beliefs about her students, her role and responsibility, and the nature of learning. Maria's words also communicate an affective dimension of her teaching. As it turns out, this affective dimension along with her beliefs are fundamental, indeed pivotal in defining Maria's teaching practice and in developing her teaching knowledge. Ultimately, the cognitive and affective dimensions of Maria's teaching interact to define the nature of learning experiences she provides for her students. This paper describes a qualitative case study inquiry into the nature of an experienced special education teacher's practice. The study further substantiates the complex, interdependent, and dynamic nature of teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Moreover, the study illuminates the vital connection between the affective and cognitive dimensions of teaching.

Introduction

Teacher attributes and competencies interact with student attributes and aptitudes to exert a powerful influence on learning (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). In particular, the multi-

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faceted beliefs that teachers hold about teaching, subjects, and their students influence their teaching practices. As Pajares (1992) asserts,

> Beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks; hence they play a critical role in defining behaviour and organizing knowledge and information"(p. 325).

Teaching behaviours are also influenced by the internal skills and ability teachers feel they possess (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; DeForest & Hughes, 1992; Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar & Diamond, 1993; Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). In addition to beliefs, teachers' knowledge influences their teaching practices (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Englert, Tarrant, & Mariage, 1992; Hillocks, 1999).

As an AAC consultant and special educator, I began to consider the application of the research literature on teacher beliefs and knowledge to teaching students whose characteristics and needs differ substantially from typically developing and achieving students. In particular, I wondered what knowledge and beliefs are effective, indeed requisite, to teaching students who have multiple disabilities, are non-speaking, and use AAC? Indeed, there is a lack of research which carefully documents effective teaching practices related to teaching students who use AAC. I am not just referring to accounts of the specific approaches, strategies, materials, and tools a teacher might use, but detailed accounts that include their reasons for doing what they do; the particular teacher characteristics that underlie effective teaching practices with this student population. As Ethell & McMeniman (2000) argue, "learning to teach effectively requires that.... teachers access the minds, not only the observable behaviours, of effective teachers" (p. 87). In order to gain insight into the relationship among teacher beliefs, knowledge, and practices, I

believed I needed to spend prolonged time with a teacher in her classroom, getting to know the details of and the reasons that underlie her teaching practice with her students. I also believed that I might learn more about this relationship by studying the practices of an experienced teacher of students who use AAC. I approached Maria, a teacher who I know on a professional basis and who is regarded by her teacher colleagues and consultants in the field of AAC to be an effective, if not "exemplary", teacher of students who use AAC. I was interested in understanding the particulars of Maria's teaching practice. I was interested in not only the moves she made with her students, but as Ethell & McMeniman advise, the thinking and beliefs that guide her moves. In essence, I wanted to "hold a lens close to the actualities of [Maria's] practice" (Greene, 1986, p. 80).

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the teaching practices of Maria as she worked with her students. My first purpose was to learn something of the particular teaching approaches, strategies and materials that Maria used with her students. My second purpose was to dig deeper into Maria's teaching practices by exploring how she creates, modifies, and interprets her work with her students within her particular classroom and school context. My research question was broadly stated: What does Maria know and believe that leads her to teach her students as she does?

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Participants and The Context

Maria

Maria has been a teacher for 21 years. She has worked in the field of AAC for 25 years. She has taught in regular classrooms and schools and in specialized schools and classrooms for students with physical disabilities who use AAC. She has been a teacher at her current school for 9 years.

The school is specialized, serving the children who are receiving treatment and services at a large urban rehabilitation centre. The underlying philosophy of the school is to integrate each student's education and therapy needs within the classroom setting. The goal of the educational program is to provide early, intensive integrated therapy and education in order to equip the students to function in their community schools.

Maria teaches in a communications classroom. The students who attend the communications classroom have complex physical needs and are, for the most part, nonverbal. The mandate of the communications classroom is to provide intensive support in assessing and developing each student's communication skills so that they are able to effectively express themselves and participate in learning.

The Students

Maria teaches six students who range in age from five to nine years: two boys and four girls. All of the students have cerebral palsy, a non-progressive motor impairment resulting from brain damage at birth. The students are not able to use some of the muscles or joints in their body. Each student uses a manual wheelchair for mobility. While two of the students have

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limited use of their hands, for the most part, the students are dependent on adults for activities of daily living such as eating, drinking, dressing, bathing, and going to the toilet.

Maria's students are learning to use other means to communicate. They are being taught to use a voluntary movement (e.g., finger, fist, eyes, etc.) to point to symbols such as Picture Communication Symbols (PCS), Blissymbols, photographs, and words as a means of communicating. These symbols represent their expressive language: the vocabulary or words the students will use in order to communicate a variety of functions. The functions of communication range from expressing their needs and wants to demonstrating their understanding and learning. The students are not able to use traditional drawing and writing tools, such as pencils, pens, or crayons. Each student will eventually use computer technology for drawing and writing purposes. Therefore, in the communications classroom another goal for the students is access to and control of computer technology for writing, drawing, and learning.

The Program

Maria's main goal for her students is to develop their communication skills. For Maria, this means not only developing an appropriate communication book which will contain the picture symbols that represent the students' vocabulary, but also providing them with opportunities to learn to use their communication tools effectively with many people.

In addition to the primary emphasis on communication, there is a kindergarten-level academic focus on beginning literacy and numeracy concepts and skills. Circle time, show and tell, reading, math, music, art, and physical education are anchor activities in Maria's program. Maria integrates communication, language, and literacy concepts and skills into each of these

activities. The goals are achieved in consultation with the others on the classroom and school team.

The Team

Maria's teaching takes place within a specialized environment that yields many advantages including the convergence of services and expertise. Maria and her educational assistant have worked together for six years. Because of the multiple and complex needs of her students, Maria's classroom team also includes an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist, a speech language pathologist, and a therapy assistant. The therapists are shared amongst the other classrooms in the school and their time is scheduled accordingly. Maria typically has one therapist in her room at any given time. An occupational therapist, a speech language pathologist and a technologist from the rehabilitation centre's augmentative communication service provide consultation support to the team. The school psychologist joins the team as required and typically assesses each child before he or she leaves the program. Maria encourages parents to be involved in supporting their children's goals at home and by volunteering in the classroom. Recognizing the assistance which is required by her students, Maria actively recruits volunteers from the community to work within the class. Collaboration among the staff of the school as a whole is integral part of meeting the needs of the children.

Method

Data Collection

I followed accepted qualitative research methodology in this inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Sandelowski, 1993). I worked as a

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participant-observer with Maria for 55 days over five months as she taught her students. My interpretations of Maria's teaching were based upon triangulated data. This data included:

i) observations of classroom activities and interactions in the form of detailed field notes;

ii) video recordings of over 100 hours of teaching events;

iii) 18 hours of semi-structured interviews with Maria (i.e., 9 interviews of approximately 2 hours each)

iv) 13 hours of semi-structured interviews with members of Maria's classroom team, including the parents of her students, an educational assistant, a variety of therapists, and administrators, teacher colleagues, and consultants; and

iv) analyses of documents, such as Maria's lesson plans, each student's Individual Education Plan, and related skill development charts.

Data Analysis

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) state, "Qualitative researchers are interpreters who draw on their own experiences, knowledge, theoretical dispositions, and collected data to present their understanding of the other's world" (p. 153). My interpretations and understandings of Maria's teaching developed through my experiences as a special educator, a consultant in the field of AAC, and a researcher. My understanding also evolved through prolonged observation, ongoing discussions with Maria and her classroom team, and analyses of the triangulated data in light of my experiences, the theoretical dispositions, and the collected data.

For the theoretical framework of this study, I drew upon the research literature within three broad domains:

(a) teacher beliefs (Copeland, Birmingham, DeMeulle, D'Emidio-Caston, & Natal, 1994; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Jordan-Wilson & Silverman, 1991; Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar &

Diamond, 1993; Jordan, Lindsay & Stanovich, 1997; Marshall, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Stanovich, 1994);

(b) teacher knowledge (Hillocks, 1999; Shulman, 1986, 1987); and

(c) expert or exemplary teaching (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Berliner, 1994; Englert, Tarrant & Mariage, 1992; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995).

It was in the luxury of staying awhile, observing closely and exploring the why of Maria's teaching that a dimension that I had not anticipated at the outset of the study emerged. This dimension revealed itself in her manner of relating to and interacting with her students, her 'way of being' with them (Noddings, 1992). To understand this unexpected dimension and its role in Maria's teaching, I consulted the literature on the affective dimension of teaching (Elbaz, 1992; Fox, 1995; Fried, 1995; Geering, 1983; Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1984, 1987, 1992).

As the various data emerged, I constructed particular meanings based upon the research literature and by conducting several theme analyses of the field notes and the interview transcripts. Maria validated the interpretations. Indeed, our conversation continued long after my stay in her classroom.

The Findings

This study further substantiates the multi-dimensional, interdependent and dynamic link among teacher beliefs, knowledge, and teaching practice (Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 1996, 1998; Pajares, 1992; Nespor, 1987; Stanovich, 1994). Maria's particular beliefs about her students, her role and responsibilities as their teacher, and the nature of knowledge interact to define her teaching practices and, in turn, shape her evolving knowledge, in particular, her pedagogical-content knowledge or wisdom of practice (Shulman,

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1987). This study also brings to the foreground the essential role of knowledge of students' characteristics and needs in developing pedagogical-content knowledge, the wisdom of practice (Shulman, 1986, 1987).

Moreover, this study highlights an affective dimension of teaching, which I have defined as 'caring'. Caring and its attendant qualities are witnessed in Maria's interactions with her students and others whom she considers to be partners in the teaching enterprise. The knowing that arises from this affective dimension informs the cognitive dimension of her teaching in very significant ways. In essence, Maria's caring, her relating, provides her with the *means* to know her students. Indeed, caring appears to be the foundation upon which Maria's pedagogical-content knowledge is developed. Interpretive exemplars of Maria's teaching practice and her comments during our discussions along with selected research literature are used to illustrate these findings.

Maria's Beliefs

Beliefs About Her Students

> *I am motivated to work with AAC users because they deserve a chance to develop their minds and to express their intelligence just as other children do (e-mail, Maria, June 27).*

Fried (1995) states, "A teacher who anticipates creativity and hidden talents in her students will greet a class quite differently from one who looks for deficits and defects" (p. 154). Maria's words portray a stance of optimism and possibility: My students have the potential to communicate effectively. My students can become literate. As she asserts,

> I really do believe these children have the potential to become literate. That's why I'm so driven to give them as much foundation as I can (Interview, Maria, June 14).

Maria's optimism is reflected not only in her words, but also in her high expectations for each student:

> Look at the child. Don't underestimate the child's cognitive abilities. Start with the child. Don't be afraid. So often people are just afraid of these children and it causes a lot of anxiety. Don't underestimate them. Don't have lower expectations because they use AAC (Interview, Maria, June 14).

Ultimately, Maria believes that each of her students has the potential to realize independence and the means to independence is through communication and literacy.

Maria's optimistic stance toward her students plays out each day in her classroom. Her optimism forms the foundation for the learning outcomes she establishes for her students: competence in communicating, reading and writing, and ultimately, independence. In turn, her beliefs determine the instructional program which supports her students' achievement of the learning outcomes. An example from the literacy activities serves as an illustration. Maria expects her students to "read" stories, while she plays a facilitating role. She engages them in the process of doing just that:

> Read the title to yourself. Read the sentences. [She pauses while each student 'reads' the title of their book.] When you're ready, you can let me know and I'll turn the page.
>
> And Bethany's reading today. Okay, so Bethany, you need to sit up nice and tall [Maria positions Bethany's head upright in the middle of her headrest.] Okay, Bethany, you say the word and I'll say it. You read the word and I'll say it. You think it. You think it even if you can't say it with your voice. I want you to think it in your head. Okay? Because that's the same as reading. You're reading even if you're just thinking of the word. Okay? Even if you can't say it out loud, if you're thinking what it is, you're reading! (April 16)

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Maria allows Bethany to *direct* the reading, waiting for her to look at the words before Maria repeats them aloud. Thus, Bethany is in charge. Bethany experiences independence in reading the story. Bethany demonstrates ability. And together, Maria and Bethany model the reading process for all of the students. For Maria, her students *can* read. For Maria's students, they *are* reading. Additional examples of Maria's optimistic beliefs about her students will be revealed through the descriptions of her beliefs about her role and responsibility and the nature of knowledge.

Beliefs About Her Role and Responsibility

> *I, as an individual teacher, can have an influence right now (Interview, Maria, June 7).*

Copeland, et al (1993) argue, "Reflecting on dilemmas stops when one believes the problem resides with the learner and not instruction" (p. 52). Maria's words are a testament to her beliefs about her role and responsibility as a teacher. I analyzed this particular set of teacher beliefs according to the Pathognomonic-Interventionist Model (Jordan-Wilson & Silverman, 1991; Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar, & Diamond, 1993; Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Briefly, this model defines teacher beliefs and assumptions as lying along a continuum. Teacher beliefs residing at one end of the continuum are referred to as "pathognomonic". That is, the difficulties that a student experiences exist *within* the child in the form of a pathological state that can be named (hence, pathog-nomonic). The goal is to refer the student to another professional for diagnosis (i.e., determine pathology) and possible remediation. Educational practices based upon pathognomonic beliefs are characterized by few interventions, little interaction with other professionals and parents, and in general a failure to

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link assessment and the curriculum (Stanovich & Jordan, 2000). In general, classroom teachers who hold pathognomonic beliefs assume little, if any responsibility for instructing students who are having learning or behavioural difficulties.

At the other end of the continuum lies what are referred to as, "interventionist" beliefs. Such teachers believe that the difficulties a student experiences result from interactions between the student and his or her instructional environment. Interventionist teachers tend to implement interventions before making referrals, follow a team-based approach, involve parents, and link assessment processes and information to instructional procedures.

Maria's beliefs about her role and responsibilities emerged as strongly interventionist, as exemplified by the quote which prefaces this section: 'I, as an individual teacher, can have an influence right now'. Rather than believing that her students' difficulties in learning reside solely with them, Maria believes that *she and the learning environment she creates* for her students are responsible for their learning. Rather than deferring to 'specialists' to support her students, Maria assumes responsibility and strives to organize her instruction in ways that support her students' growth toward the achievement of their potential. She engages her students in meaningful communication and literacy experiences because (a) she believes that her students are capable of learning these things and (b) she believes it is her responsibility to ensure that they have opportunities to do just that.

The internal skills and abilities a teacher feels s/he possesses, in other words a teacher's sense of self-efficacy, also influence teaching behaviours (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Jordan, et al,

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1997). Maria is well aware of her own strengths and limitations with regard to meeting the needs of her students. She explains,

> The children are very complex. I can't possibly have all the knowledge that I would need to have. I come at it from my own narrow perspective. On the team, everybody comes at it from their own narrow perspective. But by sharing, we learn from each other. We share the responsibilities. We sometimes share the pain. In situations where maybe we don't feel we're being effective we share so that you don't feel as one person, 'Aahh! I've got the weight of the world!' And we share the joy of it.... Also we support each other. I really believe we support each other as a team and I think that's important (interview, June 21).

Maria assumes responsibility for her students. This responsibility includes seeking resources and supports. The information gathered from other sources assists her in planning and implementing an appropriate and effective learning program for her students.

> If I have students who pose challenges I have not encountered before...I have to find outside resources to help me figure out how to program for them (E-mail, Maria, Jan. 27).

Problem-solving, reflecting and collaborating are practices which support the development of knowledge, beliefs, and expertise (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Berliner, 1994; Copeland, et al, 1994; Schon, 1983, 1987; Sternberg and Horvath, 1995). Maria's sense of responsibility and commitment to her students along with her beliefs in their capabilities and potential provide the impetus for engaging in reflection and problem-solving. Close and regular collaboration with her classroom team and school colleagues provides the opportunity for Maria to reflect on her teaching practices relative to her students. Maria's beliefs about the nature of knowledge also define her teaching practices.

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Beliefs About Knowledge

> *They need to be able to direct people....By gosh, for someone who's using AAC, if they can't learn to direct a caregiver, when will they ever get that skill? It's looking for ways to get them to be assertive and take control and to take command (Interview, Maria, April 26).*

Marshall (1992) maintains,

> Beliefs and assumptions about the nature of classroom learning have important consequences for opportunities that are provided for learning, for what is learned, for the kind of knowledge that individuals will be able to deal with, for how knowledge is used, and for how students view themselves (p. 5).

Research indicates that teachers who hold interventionist perspectives engage in more academic interactions with their students and are more persistent in actively assisting students to construct understanding (Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997). These characteristics are also identified in the literature on effective or expert teaching (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Berliner, 1994; Englert, Tarrant & Mariage, 1992; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995).

Each early spring morning, as Maria's students entered the classroom, I witnessed the 'undressing routine', the daily removal of outdoor clothing. However, rather than an adult simply removing coats, hats, and mittens, the students used their communication systems to direct an adult in removing their outdoor wear. On many mornings this routine took upwards of 30 minutes, precious time for a seemingly custodial, routine task. Maria's rationale for turning this routine task into a teaching event in her classroom extends far beyond a prescribed curriculum. She acknowledges, "It's just so easy to do everything for the kids all the time!" (Interview,

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Maria, May 3). But, Maria believes that learning occurs through active engagement, and active participation.

In Maria's classroom this means that her students learn by actively participating through communication and she organizes her teaching in ways that engage her students in constructing their knowledge and learning skills. Indeed, the nature of student participation and learning which I witnessed in Maria's classroom is in sharp contrast to what the literature indicates about the passive nature of participation and learning on the part of students who use AAC (Koppenhaver, 1992a, 1992b, 1993). Maria's students are not passive observers or listeners in her classroom. Her students "actively construct [their knowledge] in meaningful, multiply connected, contextually relevant networks that allow for deeper and interrelated understandings" (Marshall, 1992, p. 2). Dialogue figures prominently in her classroom: a remarkable feat in a classroom of non-speaking students! Maria provides both opportunities and the means for active participation. She asks questions, expects responses, provides her students with the appropriate means to communicate, and is patient in waiting for and attending to their communications. Further, she provides her students with opportunities to ask questions.

Maria also believes that the development of language, communication, and literacy are intricately connected and interdependent.

> You know as well as I do that they're [literacy and communication] so interconnected.... It's very difficult to make those kinds of divisions because if someone becomes literate then their communication will change for the better (Interview, June 21).

In Maria's classroom instruction is embedded within meaningful, integrated activities which span areas within and across the curriculum (Englert, Raphael, & Mariage, 1994). Indeed,

it was difficult to distinguish between communication and literacy in her classroom. Language, communication and literacy teaching and learning experiences are infused seamlessly into each day. Maria's students learn about language, and learn to communicate and learn to read and write by being actively engaged in authentic, purposive activities and experiences, many of which arise naturally in the course of the day. The students use their developing communication systems to prepare birthday and thank you cards. They write stories and create books based on their many school and community experiences. They direct the preparing of a special dessert for a classroom visitor by "reading" from a symbol-embellished recipe. They "read" the words of songs during music lessons and school assemblies. They use their communication books to tell their news from home while someone listens and prints it in their journal. All authentic experiences in which her students learn concepts and skills related to communicating, reading, and writing.

And Maria does not leave it up to her students to learn from these activities. She believes that if her students are to become proficient communicators, readers and writers, then language, communication, and literacy concepts and skills need to be taught systematically and explicitly. Literacy skills, such as letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding, spelling, and writing are taught directly through formal phonics and reading programs and lessons, weekly alphabet puppet shows, show and tell activities, language experience activities, and board games. Indeed, literacy concepts and skills are infused into the undressing routine as Maria prompts her students to hang up another's coat by recognizing their name above the coat hook. Thus, Maria's students

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learn to communicate *by* communicating; learn to read and write *by* reading and writing, learn to become independent by engaging in activities which allow them independence. As she states,

> "You keep demanding. You keep providing the opportunities and gradually they'll get there. They will! I know they can do it!" (Interview, Maria, April 19).

In summary, Maria's optimistic beliefs about her students, the interventionist-nature of her beliefs about her role and responsibility, and her belief that knowledge is constructed interact to define her teaching practices. Another dimension of Maria's teaching emerged as multi-faceted, qualitatively rich and as will be argued, wholly influential in developing her knowledge and defining her teaching practices: the affective dimension of teaching.

The Affective Dimension of Teaching: Caring as Relating

> *One time, you asked me.... What do you think makes a good teacher for children like this? And I was saying, you have to establish the trust and the bond and have the respect for the individual as a human being and I think that is very fundamental. And I think I really do care about these kids...They're just wonderful human beings (interview, June 14, p. 20).*

The literature on the affective dimension of teaching reveals:

> Teachers' concern for children is grounded in relationship, in the connectedness of teachers and learners (Elbaz, 1992, p. 421).

> Caring *is* relating and all human encounters are regarded as *potential* caring occasions (Noddings, 1987).

> Caring is a relationship that contains another, the cared-for (Noddings, 1987, p. 58).

> Educating is an act of caregiving, regardless of the age of the students (Goldstein, 1997, p. 3).

> ...helping another grow and actualize himself ... a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development, in the same way that friendship can only emerge in time through mutual trust and a deepening and qualitative transformation of the relationship (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 1).

I have come to understand the synonymous nature of caring and relating through Maria's teaching. Her 'manner of being', her caring, her relating and its significance to her teaching practice gradually revealed itself to me. This recognition occurred through close and prolonged observation of her interactions with her students.

I witnessed caring in Maria's acts of physical care: providing drinks to a thirsty child, offering ointment for chapped lips, brushing hair away from eyes; washing faces and laptrays. Moreover, they included acts of attending to, of noticing details, of connecting during these moments of caring. The undressing routine is not *just* a time to carry out a task or specific goals: to get the student's coats off; to teach them symbols or a way of communicating; or of reinforcing their literacy skills. It is a time to *relate* to each student, to build a relationship with each student, a relationship that both defines and influences Maria's teaching practice.

In each of these caring incidents Maria willfully and actively attended. She created "an encounter, the one with the other and the other with the one, a genuine meeting " (Buber as cited in Geering, 1983, p. 16). And in that encounter she created for herself an opportunity:

> ...the ability to notice details, to watch for small signs of growth, to remember important bits of information at the right moment . . . to understand and appreciate the complexity of these children (Elbaz, 1992, p. 426).

I witnessed caring in Maria's manner of talking to her students, the words she chose to use: 'What do you think?'; 'Tell me what you're thinking.''; "You're really thinking about it.' When probed, she explained:

> it's like sort of a validation that I want to know what you're thinking and that's interesting and to encourage them to continue to think and to express themselves

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> and to give them some feedback about what they've said about their contribution (interview, June 7).

I witnessed caring in the explanations she provided to her students, her questions, her prompts, and her responses relative to her students' responses.

And then there are the many wordless things she said to her students. There was a manner of being that was inherent in Maria's tone of voice, her animation; her smiles; her quick glances or prolonged gazes, her eye contact with her students, and her waiting, the time she took to give them an opportunity to talk. This manner of being was also witnessed in her physical contact with her students; her touches, her nudges, her way of repositioning them in their chairs, her way of knowing what they needed and of supporting them.

The literature describes several qualities which characterize caring. They include: attention, will, patience, respect, and trust.

> The moral importance of this sense of 'attentiveness' lies in the recognition of immeasurable value in the everyday details of children's lives (Elbaz, 1992, p. 426).

> Patience is not waiting passively for something to happen, but is a kind of participation with the other in which we give full of ourselves (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 12).

> In caring as helping the other grow, I experience what I care for . . . as an extension of myself and at the same time as something separate from me that I respect in its own right (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 3).

> Without a trusting and respectful relationship among students and teachers, everyone's ability to work collaboratively and to take the kind of risks that learning requires is minimized (Fried, 1995, p. 47)

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These qualities are inherent in Maria's teaching. Maria is patient in her interactions with her students. She participates fully with her students, attending, listening, observing, and providing appropriate cues and prompts. Maria attends to her students and seeks the meaning and the intent beneath her student's actions and response. Even when their behaviours are inappropriate and somewhat distracting, Maria conveys an optimism and positive attitude, teaching her students how to communicate their thoughts more effectively, usually through their communication books. Maria's consistency in her approach arises from her beliefs about her students and the nature of learning. Through consistency, Maria supports trust in her students.

Maria demonstrates respect for her students by attending fully to their communication and by her patience in providing them with opportunities to communicate. Maria connects with her students. She relates with them. And in so doing, she models caring for her students. Noddings (1987) states,

> In a classroom dedicated to caring, students are encouraged to support each other; opportunities for peer interaction are provided, and the quality of that interaction is as important (to both teacher and students) as the academic outcomes . . . .The object is to develop a caring community through modelling, dialogue, and practice (p. 7).

Maria capitalizes on situations that arise naturally throughout the course of the school day to teach her students about communication, about interaction, about relating to others. By doing so, she allows each student to experience the power of communication: independence. She teaches her students about relating by modelling caring and giving them experiences in caring. Her students are provided with opportunities to relate to others. For example, during snack time in Maria's classroom, the students are not mechanically fed and given drinks according to some

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arbitrary schedule. The activities of eating and drinking become opportunities to care, not in a custodial sense, but to relate, to connect. And in that connection there is an opportunity to teach and to learn: for her students and for Maria.

Noddings (1992) asserts "Relation precedes any engagement with subject matter" (p. 36). Caring, that is, relating with her students is requisite to Maria's teaching. Through caring, she develops a deeper understanding of her students, understanding which she brings to her teaching practices. In other words, Maria's caring is wholly connected to her pedagogy in the classroom: knowing what and how to teach her students. Maria's caring is connected to her fundamental beliefs about her students, her role, and the nature of knowledge. Her caring is connected to how she organizes her teaching to fulfill those beliefs. Ultimately, the qualities or dimensions of caring serve to broaden and deepen Maria's teaching knowledge and beliefs which, in turn, define her teaching practices.

By caring, Maria gains important insight into her students' characteristics, needs, and achievements as well as the effectiveness of her teaching practice. Caring and attentiveness are critical to developing holistic knowledge about these students, knowledge of their characteristics and needs. I refer not just to knowledge of their abilities and disabilities, but knowledge of who they are as people. Maria's caring allows her to know her students.

Thus, the multi-dimensional nature of Maria's particular beliefs along with the affective dimension of her teaching, her caring, interact and are instrumental in developing her teaching knowledge, in particular, her knowledge of her students. This in-depth knowledge of her students

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is requisite for developing her pedagogical-content knowledge: her "ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" (Shulman, 1986, p. 9).

Maria's Knowledge

> *Look at the child. Don't underestimate the child's cognitive abilities. Start with the child (interview, Maria, June 14).*

Hillocks (1999) states,

> Like most other areas of teacher knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge appears not to be some body of pre-existing knowledge that teachers dip into, but knowledge constructed by the teacher in light of the teacher's epistemological stance and conceptions of knowledge to be taught …learning theory, and students (p. 122).

Teachers possess several types of knowledge. According to Shulman (1986, 1987), these categories of knowledge include: (a) content or subject matter, (b) general pedagogy, (c) curriculum, (d) pedagogical-content, (e) learner characteristics and needs, (f) educational contexts, and (g) educational ends, purposes and values. Knowledge of learner characteristics and needs is given only fleeting mention in Shulman's (1987) Model of Pedagogical Reasoning and Action. In fact, the teacher knowledge literature appears to limit the types of teacher knowledge, downplaying or neglecting knowledge of student characteristics and its impact on making pedagogical adaptations to accommodate student learning. Indeed, Shulman states, "the activity of teaching is rarely engaged with a single student at a time. This is a process for which the special term 'tutoring' is needed" (p. 17). Yet, recent research indicates that even in heterogeneous classrooms, exemplary teachers are able to spend more time with individual learners and adapt their instruction to the individual student's level and rate of learning (Jordan, et al, 1997; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998; Jordan & Stanovich, 1996; 1998). This ability to calibrate instruction on the basis of knowledge of

students appears to be critical to effective instruction. The present study also illuminates the influential role of knowledge of learner characteristics and needs in developing teacher knowledge, in particular, pedagogical-content knowledge.

Maria acknowledges the importance of beginning instruction with the child. Her beliefs and her caring provide her with the *means* to know her students. Knowledge of her students' characteristics, needs, and progress in learning is critical to developing her pedagogical-content knowledge. As Hillocks (1999) maintains,

> Because optimistic teachers assume… that students will learn under appropriate circumstances, and because they understand that students must be engaged in the construction of their own knowledge, they set about developing activities that will allow students to do just that. Because their activities allow students to respond frequently in class to a variety of factors, they are also privy to what students are doing in response to the activity and what they seem to be thinking. Given this openness, such teachers are able to evaluate progress, consider possible revision in the activity or the store of ideas available, and take action to facilitate change in their students even while they work (p. 132).

In-depth knowledge of her students is requisite to the development of Maria's pedagogical content knowledge. By actively engaging her students in learning activities and interactions and establishing a relationship with them, that is, caring, Maria gains knowledge of their capabilities, needs, and achievements *and* the effectiveness of her teaching. She explains,

> I guess I'm following their lead because they're showing me that they know their letter sounds, so it's time for some of them to move on. I'm kind of pushing the envelope there…..I want to push them further in terms of what they can attain within the course of the year (Interview, Maria, April 26).

Thus, Maria's hopefulness "rests not in idealized images, but on a detailed and concrete perception of children's lives" (Elbaz, 1992, p. 426). Maria *knows* her students. She knows her students on at least three levels. She understands general child development. She knows the

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attendant characteristics and needs of students who have multiple disabilities and use AAC. And, Maria knows her students as *children*, as Bethany, and Mark, and Scott. She knows each child as a unique individual possessing talents, idiosyncrasies, personalities, and personal histories. Maria sees beneath the surface of her student's disabilities -- beneath the accompanying hardware. She looks beneath all of this and sees a child with feeling and ability.

> Imagine yourself in the position of going to meet your baseball idol and having no way to communicate! Can you imagine how devastating that is? (Interview, Maria, April 5).

Maria's students are children first. By looking deep within her students, she comes to know her students and believe in their potential. Her detailed and concrete knowledge of her students not only underlies, but also sustains her hope for them, her optimism and belief in their potential.

Like beliefs, Maria's categories of knowledge are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they interact and inform each other through her teaching practices. They are interdependent in defining her knowledge and teaching practice. In turn, her teaching experiences shape her knowledge. Thus, Maria's teaching knowledge both influences, and is shaped by, her teaching experiences. Maria has knowledge of language, communication, literacy, and numeracy concepts and skills, and of how they relate to her particular students. She attends to her students and follows their lead. She uses her in-depth knowledge of *each* of her student's characteristics and needs in concert with her content, curriculum, and general teaching knowledge to guide her teaching practices. She draws on all of this knowledge in modifying her curriculum, teaching strategies and materials, and indeed, the minute to minute teaching interactions with her students. She explains,

> The more experience that you get, it's scaffolding for you, as well. The more that you have something to relate [to], the more it relates to what you actually do, the more meaningful and the more of a payoff you get. It's just typical of learning (Interview, Maria, March 31).

Barth (2001) reminds us: "learning from experience is not inevitable. It must be intentional" (p. 65). Thus, Maria's own learning parallels her students' learning. Just as her students learn from their experiences, Maria learns from her teaching experiences. These experiences contribute to her evolving teaching knowledge and further shape her beliefs:

As she so eloquently commented,

> "It's a real learning experience, teaching. It's more of a learning experience than a teaching experience (Interview, Maria, April 19).

Concluding Comments

> Accounts bring us closer to the 'lived reality' of teachers' work, making us aware of the great challenge in holding the 'teaching act' together. This account can, if we are willing to let this happen, help us to reorient our own perspective on teachers, their work, and its place in the curriculum process (Elbaz, 1983, p. 67).

This study reconciles the theoretical and practical knowledge of teaching students with exceptional learning needs by providing access to the cognitive world of an effective teacher (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000). I have provided an in-depth analysis of the knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices of a "mindfully vigilant" educator (Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998). In doing so, the complexity of teaching is further substantiated, revealing the multi-dimensional, interdependent, and dynamic nature of teacher beliefs, knowledge, and practices. Moreover, through the particulars of Maria's teaching practices, I have depicted the pivotal roles of teacher beliefs and the affective dimension of teaching in informing teaching practices and developing teaching knowledge.

Knowing students appears to be pre-requisite to providing effective instruction. Maria's beliefs along with the affective dimension of her teaching, as defined by caring, provide her with in-depth knowledge of her students' characteristics, needs, and achievements. This knowledge is essential in informing her teaching. It is critical to calibrating her instruction in order to meet the learning needs of her students. Knowledge of her students is pre-requisite for determining appropriate student learning goals. It is pre-requisite for determining instructional strategies and materials which will be effective in achieving their goals. Knowing students is a pre-requisite for constructing pedagogical-content knowledge, the wisdom and practice.

Maria's caring, her relating, is a means through with she gains knowledge of her students and, therefore, is the foundation upon which her pedagogical content knowledge is developed. Indeed, I have come to understand caring as relating to be the thread that ties Maria's teaching together. Caring is the engine that drives her teaching. Regardless of what metaphor one chooses to use, caring is a mediating factor in Maria's teaching. Thus, the affective dimension of Maria's teaching interacts with the cognitive dimension to inform Maria's teaching is very significant ways. Maria's students' communications, behaviours and responses shape her knowledge and beliefs which serve to inform her teaching practices. In turn, Maria adapts her teaching on the basis of her growing knowledge of her students.

Maria's students' responses, their achievements, or lack thereof, also serve to confirm or disconfirm her multi-faceted beliefs. Her reflection on literacy instruction illustrates this important interaction:

> One thing that I've changed is that . . I always thought I didn't want them to read the story ahead because they'd get bored. Like you're coming from a different

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> world! … Now I'm finding that the more they read it, the better. Let's read it all together first, so that you are so familiar with that story that by the time you actually look at those picture symbols, you're already predicting! I don't know why I wasn't thinking that way because it fits in with the same. It fits in with the exact normal. But I wasn't thinking that way. I was trying to lead them through the story to structure them more. Now I want them to, you know, to play with it a bit…. So it kinda changed (interview, April 19).
>
> I think that you really are learning from the kids and I'm learning right now, this spelling stuff, 'I'm underestimating them! I'm not trying this soon enough!' It's really going to affect me in the future. I'm thinking, 'Hmm.' (Interview, Maria, March 31).

'It fits with the exact normal'. Maria's teaching experiences and developing knowledge of her students and her teaching lead her to re-consider her beliefs about the potential of her students and how they become literate, further substantiating that changes in beliefs follow rather than precede changes in practice (Pajares, 1992). Despite significant barriers, students who use AAC require the same instructional experiences which are considered to be practices appropriate for non-disabled students. In this particular example, this means opportunities for repeated readings, for predicting, and independently exploring texts.

It is most interesting to note the while Maria's students have disabilities and associated needs in multiple areas: physical, health, sensory, cognitive, and emotional, her teaching reveals a great deal about these students, which is not particularly unique to them. Indeed, their disabilities do not overshadow the fact that they are children, first. Moreover, their disabilities do not preclude having high expectations for their achievement, providing an authentic and meaningful context for learning, teaching concepts and skills directly within meaningful context, engaging them in the very skills which are being taught: communication, reading, and writing and all-the-while providing opportunities to experience independence. For these students, we

understand that competence in language and communication and literacy are significant links to their ultimate independence. Ultimately, Maria's teaching reveals her students' competencies demonstrating that, notwithstanding their unique characteristics and significant barriers to communicating and learning, students who use AAC benefit from the teaching practices which are generally known to effectively support student achievement. Indeed, Maria's teaching reveals her students' competencies and capabilities.

The multi-dimensional cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching are usually considered as discrete entities in the study and teaching of pedagogy. But, I witnessed Maria defining and making sense of her teaching, and determining what counts as being important for her students on the basis of *both* the cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching. Indeed it has been challenging to analyze, interpret and ultimately convey my understanding of Maria's knowledge, beliefs, caring and teaching practices as discrete entities. I believe, as Fox (1995) that we need "to readjust slightly the direction of our questioning away from the over-researched brain towards the unattended heart" (p. 15). In examining the affective aspects of Vygotsky's conception of zone of proximal development, Goldstein (1999) maintains that "the interpersonal character of the co-construction of knowledge closely resembles a caring encounter" (p. 648). Indeed, she argues,

> Although it may have been overlooked in many of the summaries and interpretations of his work, Vygotsky himself saw affect and intellect as interconnected and inseparable (p. 654).

Goldstein calls for beginning a "conversation about the role of caring interpersonal relationships in children's intellectual development" (p. 669). The present study is a step towards further

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explicating the multi-dimensional and what appears to be significantly inter-related nature of the affective and cognitive dimensions of teaching.

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